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Audience with participants in the Conference “Vulnerability and community, between welcome and inclusion”

This morning, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the participants in the Conference “Vulnerability and community, between welcome and inclusion”.

The following is the Pope’s address, which was read out by Msgr. Filippo Ciampanelli:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning and thank you for coming!

During these days you have joined together at the Fraterna Domus in Sacrofano for the second “Chair of welcome”. It is a fitting place! Not just because it is large and well-equipped: it is appropriate because it is welcoming! It is a place where elderly people, families and young people in difficulty, and migrants are welcomed. It is therefore good that the sisters of the Fraterna Domus Association are somewhat the driving force and animators of this initiative. Thank you, dear sisters!

I have seen your programme for these days: very rich and very interesting. At the centre, you have placed *vulnerability*. That is, as we would say in chemistry, you have made welcome react with vulnerability, considered in its various forms. I appreciate this choice, typically evangelical, and I would like to leave you with some pointers for reflection and for your journey.

First of all: to welcome vulnerable brothers and sisters, I need to *feel vulnerable and accepted as such by Christ*. He always precedes us: He made Himself vulnerable, up to the Passion; He accepted our fragility so that, thanks to Him, we can do likewise. Saint Paul writes: “Welcome one another, therefore, as Christ has welcomed you” (cf. *Rm 15:7*). If we remain in Him, like branches on the vine, we will bear good fruit, also in this vast field of welcome.

A second point: Jesus spent the majority of His public ministry, especially in Galilee, in contact with the poor and sick of every kind. This tells us that for us, vulnerability cannot be a “politically correct” theme, or a mere organization of practices, however good they may be. I say this because the risk is there, it is always lurking, despite all good will. Especially in the largest and most structured bodies, but even in small ones, vulnerability can become a category, individual people without a face, service a “provision” and so on. So, we must remain firmly anchored in the Gospel, in Jesus, who did not teach His disciples how to plan aid to the sick and the poor. Jesus wanted to *form disciples in a style of life, staying in contact with the vulnerable*, in their midst. The disciples saw how He met people, they saw *how He welcomed*: His closeness, His compassion, His tenderness. And after the Resurrection, the Holy Spirit imprinted this way of life in them. In this way, then, the Spirit again formed men and women who became saints, loving vulnerable people like Jesus did. Some are canonized and are models for all of us; but how many men and women have been sanctified in the welcome of the small, the poor, the fragile, the marginalized! And it is important, in our communities, to share in simplicity and gratitude the stories of these hidden witnesses of the Gospel.

I would like to leave you a final insight. In the Gospel, the poor, the vulnerable, are not objects: they are *subjects*, they are *protagonists together with Jesus in the proclamation of the Kingdom of God*. Let us think of Bartimaeus, the blind man of Jericho (cf. *Mk 10:46-52*). That account is emblematic; I invite you to reread it often, because it is very rich. By studying and meditating on this text, we see that Jesus finds in that man the faith He was looking for: only Jesus recognizes it in the midst of the crowd and the noise, He listens to his cry filled with faith. And that man, who for his faith in the Lord receives his sight again, sets out in motion, follows Jesus, and becomes His witness, so that his story has entered the Gospel. The vulnerable Bartimaeus, saved by the vulnerable Jesus, participates in the joy of being a witness to His Resurrection. I have mentioned this story, but there would be many others, with different types of vulnerability, not only physical. Think of the Magdalene: tormented by seven demons, she became the first witness of the Risen Jesus. In short, vulnerable people, encountered and welcomed with Christ’s grace and with His style, can be a presence of the Gospel in the community of believers and in society.

Dear brothers and sisters, thank you for your commitment. Keep going! May Our Lady accompany you always. I bless you from my heart. And I ask you, please, to pray for me. Thank you.
